No. 16

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

A slight cough coming from the door, warned the governess that she was no longer alone with the children. She turned her head and a wave of color surged into her face.
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THE FOLLOWING morning John Procter returned to the city while Gordon remained at home. He did not intend going back to his office on La Salle Street until his domestic tangles had been straightened out.

It was a rather inopportune time, however, to neglect his business. There were rumors of a strike at his copper mines in Montana. In addition to this the market had experienced a sharp slump.

But under existing conditions it was utterly impossible for Gordon to leave his home.

Fortunately he had a competent and trustworthy manager at the office. After a lengthy and most satisfactory telephone conversation Phil's mind felt easier. So far as his business was concerned, the manager assured him, there was nothing to worry about in the immediate future.

During the week which followed, the young mother began to recover rapidly. Her convalescence progressed so nicely that she was allowed to sit up.

But those who thought and hoped that the trying ordeal through which she had passed had awakened her soul to the extent of realizing her duties as a wife and mother, were doomed to disappointment.

Alice's shallow, selfish and frivolous nature was incapable of expansion.

While lounging in her boudoir, her mind was busily occupied devising plans for a succession of brilliant entertainments, receptions and other amusements which should indemnify her for her period of inactivity to which the hateful accident of motherhood had condemned her.

She cared absolutely nothing about her baby. The first time the nurse placed the tiny little mite in her arms, she gave a shudder and cried:

"Take it away! Take it away! I can't bear the sight of it!"

"But the baby will have to be fed or else it can't live," the nurse reproved gently. "A mother's milk is so strengthening."

Alice almost tossed the child at the speaker.

"I don't care whether it lives or dies!" she screamed, and turned her face to the wall.

When Phil heard about this occurrence he refused to believe it. Not until he had convincing proof of his second wife's utter heartlessness did he come to the full realization what kind of woman Alice was. The gulf between them began to widen.

It was the most natural thing that he should compare her with his first wife. Ah, what a wonderful mother Marie had been. How she had loved her two babies.

Finally it got so that he went to Alice's boudoir only when the latter sent for him. His love for her had died a violent death. He was trying vainly to keep what little esteem he had for her.

John Procter, now definitely settled at Oak Manor, was so wrought up when he was informed about Alice's horrible conduct, that he had to be restrained from rushing into the room with the avowed purpose of doing his daughter bodily harm.

And when he calmed down, he swore he would never go near her.

During one of his visits, Phil told Alice that her father had come to live with them at his suggestion.

She listened to this bit of obvious unwelcome news with startled surprise. The expression on her face was ugly. For nearly a full minute she remained in contemplative silence. Then suddenly she burst out:

"Was it necessary to coax that old fogey to come

here? What's the big idea?"

"Well, your father was very lonesome," he said quietly. "I really—I had no thought that you might object. I simply took it for granted that you would enjoy having your father a little closer."

"Enjoy!" Alice scoffed. "There never was much love between us. You know that. I can't understand why you do things like that without consulting me."

Gordon had difficulty in keeping himself under control.

"I am sorry," he began. "I never dreamt that—that you——"

"Sorry, fiddlesticks!" his wife snorted. "Well, alright. Since he is here, I guess we'll have to stand for him. But, please, keep him out of my room. I don't want to hear any of his tiresome lectures."

Gordon made no reply and left the boudoir, his head bowed.

He was actually ashamed of Alice. She had given him a deeper insight into her true character, and he wondered why he had not penetrated it long ago.

Ah, what a blind fool he had been to expect to find in this callous, self-centered woman the companion for whom his troubled heart yearned.

But nothing hurt him quite so much as her hateful attitude toward her own baby. It was inhuman. His heart bled for the helpless, frail bit of humanity whose life seemed to be ebbing away because of the lack of a mother's milk.

Alice showed no interest in anything outside of her own person and welfare. During Phil's visits she never once inquired about his own two children.

Nor had she shown any curiosity to know whether Miss Desmond was still their governess. All she seemed to be worrying about was how soon she would be able to

celebrate her return to society and its follies.

She was making several plans, but they could not be carried out unless she had the assistance of Nora Evans, her confidential maid.

But a surprise awaited her when she demanded one morning that Nora be sent to her boudoir. She was told that Nora Evans had been discharged by her husband. The news shocked her into a fit of hysterical anger.

"Discharged?" she shrieked, incredulous and aghast. "Discharged without my knowledge and consent. Impossible! I can't get along without her. What should——"

She checked herself suddenly and sank back among the cushions, white faced and trembling. The nurse who had furnished this information, began to feel worried. Nothing was worse for the patient than excitement and worry.

"I must have Nora!" Mrs. Gordon screamed. "Find out for sure if she has left the house."

"No, she hasn't," answered the nurse. "I saw Miss Evans last night. I understand she was permitted to remain with Mrs. Jenkins, the housekeeper, until she has found another position."

"Thank God!" Alice breathed, regaining her composure quickly. "Send someone to tell Nora that I want to see her at once."

"I'll go myself," offered the nurse.

"So nice of you." The second Mrs. Gordon smiled, then added in a confidential whisper: "I would like to be left alone with Nora for a while. Suppose you take a walk through the gardens for about thirty minutes."

"Certainly. I'll be glad to," answered nurse and went in search of Nora Evans.

A few minutes later the latter entered the bou-

doir. She had been confident that Mrs. Gordon would not submit to her being discharged without protest. And there were certain reasons why Nora's continued presence at Oak Manor had become a necessity.

The moment these two women were alone, Alice glanced furtively at her confidential maid with a question in her eyes.

"Everything is alright, Mrs. Gordon," the girl said in a guarded tone.

"Are you sure?" the mistress asked in a whisper. "You know how much depends upon it, Nora. If she should escape, I would be in an awful predicament. Since my father has come to stay with us, we must exercise the greatest care."

"Don't you worry for a moment," Nora Evans murmured. "You can trust me. You do, don't you?"

"Indeed I do," Alice hastened to rejoin. "And I want you to know how deeply grateful I am, I could never have managed it without your help. I'll see to it that you are rewarded."

"You have been very generous and most kind, dear Mrs. Gordon," the girl said with an ingratiating smile. "I suppose you have heard that Mr. Gordon discharged me a few days ago. But I hope you won't let me go. I don't like the idea of looking for another place."

Before Alice could make a reply to this, the door opened and the master of the house entered.

At the sight of the discharged maid in his wife's boudoir he stood as if transfixed and his face darkened.

"What does this mean?" he demanded angrily, addressing Alice. "What is that girl doing here. I made it plain that her services were——"

Alice tossed her head defiantly. She cut her husband short with:

"I know you discharged her, which you had no

right to do without my knowledge and consent. Please remember that Nora was engaged by me. She is my personal servant. I sent for her and she is going to stay whether you like it or not.

Philip Gordon listened in petrified silence.

This was a direct slap in his face. His jaws shut with a click, and he stepped forward with his hands clenched.

"Don't object because it won't do you any good!" his wife screamed on the brink of hysteria. "You can't ignore my position as the mistress of your household. I won't stand for it. You went too far when you asked Nora to leave. As I told you before, she is going to stay whether you like it or not."

A moment of tense silence followed this declaration.

Nora Evans stood there with an ugly smile of triumph on her face. Her mistress, already terribly wrought up, let out a shriek which drove Phil back to the door.

With an effort he restrained himself and choked back the angry words trembling on his lips. He knew well enough how utterly useless it would be to argue with Alice in her present condition.

Without a sound he turned abruptly and left the boudoir.

As usual, when he wanted to think alone, he fled to his room. His patience with Alice had just about reached the end. How could she offer him such an affront in the presence of a servant.

This sort of thing could not continue. He decided to wait a day or so and then have a serious talk with Alice.

Conditions had reached a state when a change was imperative if Oak Manor was to be kept as their summer

home.

Alice's vanity and frightful extravagance threatened him with financial ruin. But even that Phil would have condoned had she been a woman with a soul.

As he had done so often lately, he thought of his first wife, Marie. Ah, what a wonderful woman she had been. How modest in her demands, how sweetly feminine. Yes, they had been happy together. A deep sigh swelled his breast.

Stepping over to the window, Phil gazed down upon the grounds. There he saw Miss Desmond coming along with the two children.

How they clung to her hands. How trustingly, how lovingly they looked up at this truly wonderful young woman. Again Phil sighed.

Somehow he could not drag his eyes away from her slender, yet finely developed figure. Yes, she was beautiful. Never before had he realized this so keenly. And there was about her something strangely reminiscent.

She had the eyes, the carriage and the voice of the one he had loved so dearly and lost. Yes, she reminded him very strongly of Marie. But the face was that of a total stranger.

As Philip Gordon continued to gaze upon the beautiful picture below, he saw something that brought a quick frown to his face.

Nora Evans, coming from the house, was moving rapidly toward the group of three, then passed them, her nose tilted at an aggressive angle. Both of the children instinctively drew away from the girl.

The governess nodded and received an insolent stare for her civility.

Phil drew back from the window, reddening with shame and mortification. How weak and contemptible

he appeared now in his own eyes for having yielded to Alice in permitting Nora Evans to stay.

The atmosphere in the room began to stifle and oppress him.

He felt the need of fresh air and some vigorous bodily exercise to quell the storm that raged within him and threatened to burst out any moment. He moved cautiously toward the door and stole out.

In his present mood he had no desire to meet his father-in-law. He was quite sure that old John Procter would fly into a rage and perhaps create a scene if he learned of his last quarrel with Alice and the stand she had taken.

It was well toward evening when he made his way to the stables and had his favorite horse saddled. After sending word to the housekeeper and also to his father-in-law, not to wait dinner for him, he dashed off into the open country.

Relief at least in some measure came to his troubled heart as he passed the farmers homeward bound and they spoke to him with smiles not wanting in respect. Ah, how he envied them the peace which shone from their honest faces.

On and on he rode, as if determined to put as much space as possible between himself and Oak Manor.

Just before darkness fell, he stopped at a farm-house to quench his thrist. His knock on the door was answered by a woman with a healthy bouncing baby on her arms.

"Would you be kind enough to give me a glass of water?" he asked, lifting his hat.

The woman smiled. It was the smile of a happy young mother. The glory of it was reflected in her wide eyes. Phil felt ashamed.

"We have some nice fresh buttermilk," she said,

her soft voice mingling melodiously with the cooing of the baby. "You can have a glass of that if you like. Oh Jim," she called to the inside. "Please come here just a minute."

The man called "Jim" came. He was a wonderful specimen of robust young manhood. But what impressed Gordon most about him was the expression of utter peace and contentment on his sun-burned face.

"Give this gentleman some buttermilk," the woman said in a tone that was kindly authoritative. "Or you hold the baby and I'll——"

"I'll get it, honey," the young farmer grinned amiably at Phil.

While the latter waited he watched the woman disappear with her baby. The sigh which rose to his lips came from the bottom of his heart.

That real happiness dwelled in that modest home was very evident. But he lived in a castle to which peace, happiness and contentment had become strangers.

When the buttermilk was brought, he drank deeply. Three glasses the young father urged him to take. And then he rode away, satisfied, for his eyes had seen a miracle.

The cool night air felt good on his hot temples. Whither the road led he did not know. He gave the horse free reign.

Chapter 51

A TELEGRAM.

THE HOUR was late when Philip Gordon returned to Oak Manor. It was a beautiful moonlight night with myriads of stars glistening in the dark blue sky. Before he passed into the grounds his gaze rested for some time on the magnificent home which stood snugly protected by clusters of giant trees.

Beyond them the tower raised its peak. Not expecting any of the servants to be waiting for him, he directed the horse straight to the stable in the rear.

It was not the first time that he unsaddled his own horse. Having performed this task, he mopped his brow and stood for a little while, his eyes taking in the immediate surroundings. In this position he got another view of the tower, for it rose to its dizzy height directly before him.

Suddenly he started. Bathed in the mellow moonlight, the windows were sharply outlined. At one of them he saw, or imagined he saw, a moving figure. It looked like that of a woman.

Presently the apparition vanished, then appeared again. This time Gordon was quite sure that it was a woman.

His nerves were tingling and a feeling of awe took possession of him. More than once he had heard that the tower was haunted, and he had smiled incredulously. But he was not smiling now.

However, he had no particular desire to start a personal investigation at this late hour of the night. But

he concluded to subject the tower to a thorough investigation the next day.

As he walked slowly toward the house he argued with himself that it was not impossible for someone to hide in the tower.

He recalled that before he became the owner of Oak Manor, that on two occasions tramps had been driven from the interior of this medieval old structure.

Various and conflicting thoughts filled his mind. But upon entering his room they became centered upon a familiar yellow envelope which had been placed in a conspicious position on the table.

Evidently the person who put it there wanted to make sure that he saw it.

Phil snatched up the envelope, broke the seal, and extracted a sheet of paper of the same color. It contained the following telegram:

> "Jack Hoover fatally injured in automobile accident, now lying in the General Hospital, Cincinnati, at the point of death. He insists that he has a confession to make to you. Come at once."

Gordon turned the sheet over and read the message for the second time. Then he passed a trembling hand over his heated brow. Something seemed to tell him that a confession from Jack Hoover involved his first wife.

Instantly Marie's apparent intimacy with this man rushed back into his mind with all its unpleasant details.

For a moment he hesitated, undecided whether to heed the dying man's call or not. It was a long ways to

Cincinnati. And even if he caught the midnight train, he would not arrive at his destination much before nine o'clock the next morning.

But the next instant his mind was made up. He decided to go. Although he hated Jack Hoover bitterly as the destroyer of his happiness, he felt that he could not allow himself to be swayed by thoughts of vengeance.

An unaccountable something, moreover, urged him to obey the summons. He glanced at his watch and discovered that he had just time to catch the train which left the Twelfth Street Station at twelve-thirty.

He changed clothes quickly, threw a few articles into a traveling bag, and hurried downstairs toward the servants' quarters to wake the chauffeur.

Within fifteen minutes they were on their way to the railroad station. The train arrived in Cincinnati on time, and Phil boarded a taxi which took him in all haste to the General Hospital.

After making a few inquiries, he was introduced to the physician in charge, Mr. Keller.

"I received a telegram," Gordon began as he drew the paper from his pockete. "It explains why I am here, doctor."

The latter gave the paper one glance, then his gaze shifted to Phil.

"So you are Mr. Gordon of Chicago," he said quickly. "Well, I am glad you came. I ordered that telegram to be sent to you. The poor fellow is still alive but he can't last many more hours."

Philip Gordon compressed his lips and followed the physician in silence.

They entered a private ward and on the bed, breathing but faintly, lay Jack Hoover. He must have heard the slight creaking of the door as it opened, for he twisted his head in an effort to see who came in.

"Will it be alright to talk to him?" Gordon asked the physician in a whisper.

"Perfectly alright," answered Dr. Keller. "It can not change the issue. The man is done for and he knows it. Now I'll leave you alone with him. After you get through with him, call at my office. I want to speak to you about another matter which, I think, will interest you."

Philip nodded and turned to approach the bed. Jack Hoover's pale lips were curled in a painful smile.

"Glad—to see you, Gordon," the latter said huskily. "Please—sit close so—so you can hear me. My—my strength is—is giving out fast. And—don't—don't look as if you—you are ready to—to strangle me. I got all that—that was coming to me."

A revulsion of feeling came over Phil and that old hatred and bitterness rose in his heart.

He drew back when he met Hoover's eyes, fixed on his own with such anxious pleading that he could not resist.

Taking the outstretched hand, he sat on the edge of the bed and bent over until his ear was but a few inches from the dying man's mouth.

"Gordon, I have done—you a great wrong," Jack Hoover began in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper, yet clear and distinct. "I laid the foundation—for the tragedy which came into your life. That—that flashlight picture taken the night of the Madison Country Club dance, was a pre-arranged affair. Your — your wife was an unwilling part to it."

The speaker paused and took a long breath, then he clutched desperately at Philip Gordon's trembling hand.

"Your — your wife was the noblest and purest woman I have ever met," he went on. "But I framed her

like I did quite a number of others. It was a daring blackmailing scheme. That—that night, when I tried to —to kiss her, she slapped my face.

"But you—you, made a fatal mistake, too, that same night. You came in with — with Alice Procter. Your wife was jealous, and she had been led to believe that you cared for Alice. To—to get even with you, she turned to me. That was the chance I had been waiting for. The result was that flashlight picture which cost you five thousand dollars."

Again Jack Hoover paused to gather what was left of his fast waning strength.

"Then—then I heard that you and your wife separated because that—that she had eloped with me to Cincinnati," he continued, his features convulsed with pain. "Our—our meeting on the train was accidental. She—she turned me down cold when I—when I insisted upon talking to her.

"She—she told me that she was going to—to visit an aunt of hers on Walnut Hills. When I suggested that I accompany her, she told me something no other woman ever told me before. But it—it was the truth—every word of it.

"I—I do not ask you to forgive me, Gordon. I—I don't suppose you could do that. But I could not die without telling you what—what a wonderfully loyal wife you had in—in Marie.

"She — she never wronged you, not even in thought. I—I have not much longer to live. In perhaps another hour I shall stand at the—at the seat of judgment. I——"

The rest of the sentence Phil could not hear, and when he looked at Jack Hoover he saw that his lips no longer moved. Even his eyes were closed.

In grim silence he watched this man who had so

ruthlessly wrecked his life's happiness. Boundless rage took possession of him. He seized Hoover by the shoulders and shook him.

"Damn you!" he hissed. "You ought to die. But just dying is too good for you. I could tear the heart out of you!"

Hoover's eyes opened slowly. He framed the words mechanically:

"I—I deserve—any punishment, Gordon. I—I wish I had—spoken sooner. But I—I was too much of a—of a coward."

"Yes," cried Phil. "If you had only told me all this sooner. How much suffering and pain would have been spared to us. Marie came to me on her knees and protested her innocence. But I would not believe her. I sent her out into the world to meet an untimely end. Oh, Hoover, what have you done to me and her!"

This agonized accusation from Philip Gordon pierced the dying man's heart like a knife thrust. He lay, writhing and twisting, his bloodless lips uttering words that could no longer be heard.

Philip Gordon had released his hand and sat benumbed, bewildered. The first clear thought that came thundering through his brain was that Marie, his incomparable first wife, had been blameless, absolutely innocent.

She had been the victim of a vile conspiracy—that contemptible thing called "blackmail."

She had not eloped with Jack Hoover to Cincinnati. Her meeting with Hoover had been accidental. And he had condemned her without knowing the facts in the case.

In his injured pride he had closed his ears to her tearful pleas and protestations.

He had driven her, an innocent woman, into the

arms of death!

With a slow move, Gordon rōse to his feet. He stood gazing at the dying man undecided whether to pity or curse him.

Jack Hoover's eyes opened once more. The expression in them was one of mute supplication. It seemed that he was still fighting off the grim reaper until a word of forgiveness came.

Years and years seemed to pass for the wretched man on the bed whose glance hung in feverish suspense on the stern face above him.

Eternities seemed to come and go in that agony of waiting.

"For—give me," Hoover whispered, his heart beating faintly.

Gordon cleared his throat.

"Yes, I'll forgive you," he said hoarsely. "May God have mercy upon your soul."

The dying man's face lit up for an instant only. Then it became stony and calm. His head turned to one side and a feeble sigh came from his lips before they were sealed in eternal sleep.

His eyelids began to droop, and finally closed never to open again.

Jack Hoover, the modern Don Juan, Jack Hoover, the modern soldier of fortune and despoiler of happy homes, had gone to reap his reward, to face his judgment before a just God.

Philip Gordon's mind was in a mad whirl. He did not see the dead man lying before him. Neither did he see the nurse who tip-toed into the room and drew a white sheet over the mask-like features.

A sudden need of fresh air sent him to the window, where he stood like a statue.

The nurse glanced at Gordon several times as she

busied herself. She saw the sorrowful expression of his face. She heard the stifled groans which escaped his lips. Once he tottered and reached for the back of a chair.

She summoned Dr. Keller, and between them they led Phil from the room to the physician's private office.

Not until he had been given a stimulant did Gordon come out of the deadly lethargy. Dr. Keller's sympathetic gaze he returned with a pitiful smile.

Then his pent-up emotions broke loose and rushed forth in a succession of passionate sobs.

Dr. Keller had seen strong men weep before. As a rule they could not be quieted with words of sympathy. He allowed Phil to sob until the storm spent itself.

"If you feel a little better, Mr. Gordon," he said afterward very gently, "I would like to chat with you for a while."

Phil nodded his head.

"I surmise—in fact I know, that the disclosures made to you by the man who just passed away involved someone near and dear to you," the other went on in the same gentle tone. "I have reasons to suspect that this person was your wife."

"Yes, you are right," Gordon answered with a moan. "She was my wife whom I sent to her death because of an insane, unreasonable jealousy. Hoover was the man in the case. His confession makes me a murderer. I——"

Again a succession of sobs shook him. Then with an effort he pulled himself together and told the whole tragic story.

"I am able to add another link," said Dr. Keller as Phil ended his recital. "When Mrs. Gordon came to Cincinnati to visit her aunt on Walnut Hills, she was struck by an automobile as she was about to board a streetcar.

She was brought here and I had charge of her case."

"And I accused her of having spent that week at a hotel with Jack Hoover," the unhappy man groaned. "Oh, why did I refuse to believe Marie. She was innocent—innocent."

"It was most unfortunate, Mr. Gordon," soothed Dr. Keller. "But the past can not be recalled, nor can the dead be brought back to life. You wronged your wife and endless remorse is your punishment. But you'll have to pull yourself together and try to get over it, my friend. You owe something to your two children and to the woman you married afterward."

"Yes, so I do," replied Phil bitterly and squared his shoulders. "Thank you for reminding me of that, doctor. It reminds me also that I must return to Chicago as quickly as possible."

With his head erect he rose and strode toward the door.

"If—if the body is not claimed by relatives, please see to it that it is decently buried," he said. "I'll pay the expenses."

Dr. Keller held out his hand and smiled.

"That is noble of you, sir," he declared. "But Mr. Hoover gave me the name and address of a brother living in Omaha, Nebraska. I sent him a telegram and no doubt he will come to take charge of the dead man's affairs."

They shook hands and then Philip Gordon left rather hurriedly.

After the door had closed, and Dr. Keller found himself alone, he stood at the window for a long moment with his arms folded across his breast. And he did some deep reflecting.

"I have been brought in touch with a good many domestic triangles, but never one like this," he mur-

mured. "Gordon is the first man who was big and generous enough to want to see to it that the man who wrecked his home received a decent burial.

"And Hoover was the first man who made a clean breast of his past in order to clear the woman he had wronged. He may have been pretty much of a skunk, but he deserves more credit than he received."

Having expressed himself in this manner, the physician sat down at his desk, reached for paper and pen, then began to write rapidly

Chapter 52

REMORSE.

DURING his trip back to Chicago, Philip Gordon had ample time for reflection. Remorse tortured him unmercifully. The hour at Jack Hoover's deathbed had once more brought him face to face with the past, with his vanished happiness, his paradise lost. He saw his own soul's nakedness. Pride and insane jealousy had been the elements which damned him and made his life a living hell.

Oh, yes, there was a time when in his self-righteousness he felt fully justified in having taken such drastic measures.

There was a time when he persuaded himself that he hated his first wife—hated the memory of her, and now he was swept with the sudden realization that he still loved her with a passion that reached beyond the grave.

Alice? A shadow clouded his face as he thought of her. She paled into absolute insignificance when compared with Marie.

Ah, what a fool he had been to chose for a second life's mate a woman without a soul, yes, even a woman without character.

After the tragic separation with Marie, his heart had yearned for sympathy, for consolation.

He had deluded himself into believing that Alice Procter was the type of a woman capable of helping him build anew out of the ashes of his lost happiness. Ah, what a horrible delusion indeed. How clear it all was now.

Alice's interest in him had been cold calculation which prompted her to console him in his bereavement.

"I want to make you happy again, Phil, dear," she had said, and I know I can if you give me only half a chance."

These were the words which came back to Gordon as his mind's eyes viewed the ruins of his domestic life.

He admitted ruefully that he had fallen for Alice's wonderful beauty. Strange that it never occurred to him that she had followed him all the way to Paris in order to lead him to the altar.

Certain little incidents came back to him now clothed with sinister meaning.

His proposal of marriage had scarcely been uttered when she accepted him. During the first few weeks of their honeymoon he thought he had found in Alice all that his first wife had been.

But by degrees she began to show her true colors. She had revealed herself in all her ugly selfishness and cruel indifference to his physical and mental welfare.

Her professed love for his children had been mere pretense—a means to an end.

It was close to ten o'clock when the train drew into the Twelfth Street Station. He might have telegraphed to his chauffeur to meet him there, but having failed to do so, he engaged a taxi.

The drive out to Oak Manor seemed like an eternity. At the gate leading into the spacious grounds, he alighted and paid the driver.

The night was very warm, and occasionally he paused in his walk along the graveled path to wipe the perspiration from his brow. Not a breath of air stirred.

The moon shed a yellow light upon the beautiful scene before him. Oak Manor was indeed a wonderful

place, but Phil's face showed no elation.

What mattered all earthly possessions when peace and contentment were missing. His present state of mind precluded the possibility of enjoying anything. Like a man wearied to death, he plodded on.

Suddenly he stopped. What was that moving on a bench under that tall oak tree? He blinked several times and brushed a hand across his eyes.

Yes, he saw it distinctly now. It was the form of a woman. She evidently was not aware of his approach, for she sat with her head thrown back and her pale features turned upward.

Hers was a face, once seen, not easily forgotten. It was lovely, although the eyes spoke of a tragedy.

Gordon took another step forward, and in doing so, his foot broke a twig lying on the ground. In the dead silence of the night this sounded like a pistol shot.

With a smothered scream the woman started up and fled in the direction of the tower.

"Wait a moment," called Phil after her, but she paid no heed.

Greatly puzzled and mystified, Gordon's stare followed her until she was out of sight. Who was she, and what was she doing out there at this late hour of the night? And why did she make straight for the tower?

She had the figure of youth. Her movements, though swift, were not devoid of grace. As he stood there pondering whether to pursue her or not, it suddenly occurred to him that it was the same figure he had seen leaning against a top window in the tower the night before.

It was inconceivable that anyone should live up there without his knowledge. He determined that the tower should be thoroughly investigated the next day By the time he reached his room, his excitement had sub-

sided.

Sleep was utterly out of the question. He tossed and moaned like a man in terrible pain until the gray dawn filtered through the windows.

At last he fell into a sleep troubled with horrible dreams. He saw his wife in the arms of another man When he protested she defied him.

In his uncontrollable wrath he seized her by the throat and began choking her. Her screams awakened him and he sat up with the perspiration streaming down his face.

But what he had heard was not a scream at all The chauffeur was cleaning one of the cars, and he had tried the claxton.

He arose and a cold bath refreshed him somewhat But it could not erase the new lines in his face, nor banish the look of misery from his eyes. He went downstairs with a slouching gate and his shoulders sagging.

His general appearance and attitude were those of a man about ready to give up.

How he yearned for a comforting word from someone. But to whom could he go with his new grief? His thoughts turned to old John Procter, his father-in-law and loyal friend as well.

But the latter was not eaesy to find this morning He had risen early, as was his wont, and was now enjoying a brisk walk through the grounds.

Occasionally these walks took him beyond to neighboring estates and surrounding farms. He loved the smell of new mown hay, the sight of ripening grain and the pleasant "Good morning" from passing farm-hands.

Gordon went into the breakfast room and hastily swallowed a cup of black coffee. With a cigar between his lips he went in search of the old gentleman.

It proved to be a sort of a wild goose chase, which ended when he found the object of his search about two hours later in the den adjoining the library.

The two rooms connected through a sliding door which stood partly ajar. It happened that when Phil entered the den, Marie Desmond came into the library for the purpose of selecting a book.

She heard the mutual greeting of the two men. And she detected something in her former husband's voice that startled her not a lilttle. It was a note of sorrow akin to despair.

She glided noiselessly to the opening in the sliding door and peered into the den.

Philip was standing face to face with his father-in-law. Their hands were clasped and it seemed that Phil was about to break down.

"I missed you, my boy," the older man was saying. "Where have you been all of yesterday?"

"Dad, I have a day and night behind me that I shall not forget as long as I live," Gordon answered, his lips quivering. "I was called by telegram to Cincinnati where Jack Hoover lay at the point of death. He had met with an automobile accident. He——"

"What did that skunk want with you?" John Procter broke in.

"He wanted to relieve his black soul by making a confession, dad."

"A confession?" The older man gave vent to his surprise by emitting a long whistle. "Well, that is interesting. What was the nature of his confession?"

Gordon did not make a reply at once. He dropped into a chair and shaded his eyes with his hand.

After his father-in-law had seated himself a few feet away, he began to relate his story in all its amazing details.

And Marie, leaning against that sliding door, dug her fingers above her heart to keep from crying out loud.

She was listening to her own vindication, coming from the lips of the man who had so cruelly wronged her. But it came too late. Another woman claimed him as her husband.

"Dad," the wretched man ended as he leaned forward and burst into tears. "I would give every dollar I possess and twenty years of my life if I could undo the frightful injustice to my first wife. I loved Marie passionately. She was my ideal.

"There never was, and there never will be another woman like her. But I cast her off in a fit of unreasonable jealousy. I treated her worse than a convicted criminal. I was unjust—cruelly unjust.

"I drove her from my house with accusations one might apply to a common woman of the street. You need not tell me that—that I am not directly responsible for her—for her tragic death. I am—I am her murderer. I am——"

He broke down utterly at this point and tears choked him.

Marie could not restrain her emotion. With her handkerchief tightly pressed to her mouth, she stifled the agonized sounds. Hers were the emotions impossible to describe in mere words.

"Thank God! Thank God!" her happy heart cried out.

She was tempted to step through the door and admit her identity.

Philip still loved her. He had always loved her. In the sight of Heaven he still belonged to her, for the sacred union of their souls had never been dissolved.

But, she realized quickly that such a move under existing conditions was sheer madness.

Philip Gordon was now the husband of another woman. There was a little baby girl to strengthen the tie which bound them. If she revealed herself she would place the man she loved so dearly in a most frightful position.

"God help me!" she prayed as she had never prayed before. "God help me to do the right thing!"

After Philip Gordon had finished speaking, a long space of silence fell. He sat with his convulsed features in his hands, and an occasional sob broke from his lips.

Then old John Procter rose, went over to the side of his wretched son-in-law, and touched him on the shoulder.

"It is a terrible thing, my boy," he said gently. "But you will have to bear up under it. You made an awful mistake and you are suffering for it. I never believed Marie guilty. I am glad Hoover was man enough to clear her in your eyes."

"He did that," groaned Phil. "And he did a great deal more. He made me realize what a pearl I cast away." He raised himself and wiped the moisture from his cheeks. "At least I can revere my first wife's memory now. It will live like a thing clean and beautiful until I draw my last breath."

John Procter nodded and took a few turns up and down the room.

As he did so he happened to notice the sliding door ajar. Someone was behind that door, he felt it instinctively.

Without saying a word he stepped forward quickly and pushed the two panels apart.

When his searching gaze swept the library it encountered nothing but the handsome furniture and a number of cases filled with books. He was disappointed.

But nothing could shake his belief that someone

had been eavesdropping in the library while he and Phil talked. His first thought was that Nora Evans had been the guilty person.

"By the way, my boy," he cried, suddenly whirling upon his son-in-law. "I thought you discharged that impudent hussy, Nora Evans."

"So I did," replied Phil, "but——"

"Well, I saw her this morning," the older man broke in. "And you ought to have seen her. She had the usual chip on her shoulder. The way she bossed the other servants around in the kitchen amazed me. That girl is a natural born trouble maker.

"I wouldn't have her in the house. How is it that she is still here if you fired her, my boy? You did fire her, didn't you? If I remember correctly, you told me yourself you did, Phil."

The latter bowed his head. For a moment he seemed at a loss what to answer.

"You — you see," he began to stammer at last, "Nora is my wife's maid. Alice nearly had a fit when she found out that I discharged the girl. She——"

"She gave you the devil, and you stood for it like a nice little boy," John Procter interrupted angrily. "Oh, you needn't tell me any more. That daughter of mine insisted upon having her way so far as Nora Evans was concerned, and you gave it to her."

Gordon's head sank lower. He had been listening to an unpleasant truth.

"I am sick and tired of these frequent quarrels with Alice," he said. "So far as I am personally concerned Nora can stay. However, I shall insist that she confine her activities to the boudoir of her mistress."

The old gentleman nodded.

"You are the master here, my boy," he responded, patting his son-in-law on the shoulder. "I don't want to

appear like a meddler in your domestic affairs. But I'll tell you this, no matter what the reasons for you quarreling with Alice may be, I am on your side."

"Thanks, dad."

"However, a word of caution may not be amiss," John Procter went on, lowering his voice. "Ever since I came here I have been keeping an eye on this Nora Evans. There is something about her that rubs my fur the wrong way. I don't like that sneaky look on her face. I tell you, that girl is dangerous."

Philip Gordon's only reply was a shrug, and his father-in-law, obviously disappointed at the meagerness of the reply, turned and left the room muttering to himself as he went.

Chapter 53

"I LOVED HER!"

IT WAS a trying day for Philip Gordon. Wherever he went he saw before him the beautiful face and the sad eyes of Marie, looking at him reproachfully, yet tenderly. In this state of mind he was utterly unequal to playing the host to the many curious visitors who came to inquire after Alice and to inspect the baby.

With every nerve strained and his heart almost bursting with secret sorrow, he found it a torture to exchange the usual polite social phrases.

As much as he could he stayed close to his room, for nothing suited him better just now than absolute quietness and solitude. Late in the afternoon he emerged to go to the nursery.

And he went with a feeling of guilt. Not only was he directly responsible for them losing their sweet, gentle mother. He had also neglected them to a degree.

By redoubling his attention to them, by lavishing all his love upon them, he hoped, in a measure, to expiate the terrible wrong he had done to their mother.

There was a grim expression on his face as he opened the door leading to the nursery. He did so quietly and entered unobserved.

Marie Desmond sat beside Harry, following with deep interest the boy's efforts to solve a mathematical problem. Little Phyllis was seated on the floor, directly at the feet of the governess.

The latter was dexterously wielding a pair of scissors, cutting figures from a magazine and holding them

up with gleeful shouts to Miss Desmond for inspection.

It was a peaceful scene, it was a beautiful scene Philip Gordon beheld and he stood sock still at the door.

He made no attempt to force back the suspicious moisture which rose to his eyes. There were his two little lambs, whom he had robbed of their mother in the care of a stranger.

Marie remained unaware of Gordon's presence in the room. She was utterly absorbed in the task at hand.

The boy finished his problem and leaned back expectantly for a word of approval from the governess. And it was given almost instantly.

"Why that is just splendid," Marie exclaimed, drawing the boy tenderly to her breast. "You are improving fine. You don't know how proud I am of you, my little darling."

How she kissed him and how she caressed him. And how the boy's pale features changed with that happy smile upon it.

Philip Gordon found it more difficult to down that lump in his throat. A tear gathered at his lashes and rolled down his cheeks to be wiped away hastily.

A slight cough coming from the door, warned the governess that she was no longer alone with the children

She turned her head when she perceived him still standing at the door, a wave of color surged into her lovely face.

She released Harry and jumped to her feet, her lips parted, and thus revealing two rows of even and very white teeth.

"Oh, Mr. Gordon!" she gasped.

"Please don't let me disturb you, Miss Desmond," he observed as he came forward gratefully. "It does my heart good to see how well you-three get along."

Continued in next number

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